



Department of Justice

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
MONDAY, FEBRUARY 29, 2008
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CRM
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TDD (202) 514-1888

FOREIGN NATIONALS SENTENCED IN ALIEN SMUGGLING AND CONSPIRACY TO SUPPORT THE FARC

WASHINGTON – Five foreign nationals have been sentenced by a federal judge in Miami for their roles in a conspiracy to smuggle purported terrorists to the United States from Colombia, Assistant Attorney General Alice S. Fisher of the Criminal Division and U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of Florida R. Alexander Acosta announced today. All 10 defendants charged in the original indictment have now been convicted and sentenced for their crimes.

Victor Daniel Salamanca (Salamanca), 65, of Bogota, Colombia; Jalal Sadat Moheisen (Sadat), 50, a Palestinian national residing in Bogota; and Carmen Maria Ponton Caro (Ponton), 38, of Bogota, were sentenced to 70 months in prison by Judge Joan A. Lenard after pleading guilty to one count of conspiracy to provide material support or resources to the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC, a State Department-designated foreign terrorist organization. All three received sentencing enhancements based on their roles as leaders of the criminal organization. Their co-conspirators Nicolas Ricardo Tapasco Romero (Tapasco), 45, and Edizon Ramirez Gamboa (Ramirez), 40, both of Bogota, were sentenced to three years incarceration after pleading guilty to conspiracy to commit alien smuggling and bringing aliens to the United States for private financial gain. All five defendants were also sentenced to three years supervised release and received judicial deportation orders.

The five defendants were arrested along with five other co-defendants in Colombia in January and February of 2006, as the result of an Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) sting operation. U.S. government informants posed as FARC operatives seeking illicit travel to Miami for the purpose of laundering FARC money from the United States to Colombia. The laundered funds, represented as drug proceeds, would finance additional drug and arms purchases in support of the FARC's mission.

From May 25, 2005, to Jan. 2, 2006, the alien smuggling organization, led by Salamanca, Sadat, and Ponton obtained fraudulent Colombian and Spanish passports and other identity documents for the purported terrorists. Using contacts including Tapasco and Ramirez – each of whom are former law enforcement officers with Colombia's federal law enforcement agency – the organization circumvented Colombian airport immigration controls and smuggled the purported terrorists to the United States. In addition, Salamanca and his co-conspirator

Lopez engineered a money laundering scheme intending to move up to \$5 million per week of purported FARC drug money.

The case was investigated by the Office of the ICE Attache in Bogota, Colombia. Trial Attorney Brian Skaret of the Domestic Security Section (DSS) of the Department of Justice prosecuted the case. Support was provided by the Department's International Affairs' Office of the Judicial Attache in Colombia. Assistant U.S. Attorney William White of the Southern District of Florida served as local counsel on the case. Valuable support was also provided by Colombian and Panamanian law enforcement authorities, and DSS Program Analyst Dawn Cauraugh.

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